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DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES # G -2

MEMORANDUM FOR Brian Monaghan
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Attention: Decennial Design, Policy and Management Branch

Through: Howard Hogan *Howard Hogan*
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From: Miriam Rosenthal *MR*
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Subject: Observation of Block Canvassing—Wave 2, Training and Field Operations
In and Around Austin, Texas; February 24-26, 1999 and March 1-2, 1999

I. INTRODUCTION

I observed Block Canvassing—Wave 2 in and around Austin, Texas. The first three days I observed training. The next two days, I observed field operations, including block canvassing in a remote area, initial block canvassing field observations, a crew leader selecting and checking two dependent quality assurance samples, a crew meeting, and a crew leaders' meeting.

II. TRAINING

A. Getting Started

There were two instructors and thirteen trainees. The instructors were wearing photo identification. The classroom was arranged in a square. The instructors had pre-filled name placards at each place, and extra pens and paper were available. Three persons drifted in late, one of them 30 minutes late. The class was filling out paperwork, so the late arrivals didn't fall behind in the training.

B. Filling Out Forms

The instructor inventoried the forms in the packet, showing each form as he inventoried it. A couple of the forms had slightly different form numbers from the forms in the individual packets. Since there were two instructors, one instructor checked on the form numbers and reported back that the discrepancy in the forms did not affect the content. As the forms were being filled out, the instructor walked around the room trouble-shooting. He told everyone to look up when done with the work. Some of the jargon like "decennial" was new to the class.

The instructor told everyone the date, gave them the spelling for "Bureau," and told them the Regional Census Center phone number. One person who was a veteran had more fields to complete and fell behind. He was told he would be helped at the break. The optional demographic form (Welfare-to-Work participation form) was brushed over as "just in case anyone wants to fill it out." The oath was administered. It made people feel patriotic and that their job was important. During the break, a trainee suggested to me that an overhead projector with some fields filled in by the instructor would have expedited the paperwork.

C. Confidentiality and Getting Paid

This portion of the training introduced the census and the payroll forms. The instructor explained "confidentiality," had the class read the Privacy Act form that was to be given to respondents, and told the class to refer any press inquiries to the Dallas Regional Census Center.

The job basics were then reviewed. The trainer explained that the canvassers were intermittent employees, who could only work an 8 hour day and a 40 hour week, including travel to and from home. The employee handbook on page 3-11 gave an example with a mistake on how to fill out their payroll forms. The example was filled out wrong for hours worked, 5½ hours worked should be 5.50 not 5.30 as printed in the handbook. The session ended with a short quiz on the census, which was a good reinforcer of the overview.

D. The Training

Overall, the instruction was engaging. The class was attentive, asked questions, and volunteered for parts in role-playing exercises. The instructors alternated instructing (until one instructor was called away), which was a good mix of styles, and the class also added their voice. The instructors modulated their pace by stating "If I am going too fast, let me know" and punctuated their presentation with "Any questions?" The instructor would come closer to the trainee's table to answer questions, which was effective.

E. Training and Reference Materials

The training materials were a good starting point, but the reference materials were incomplete and frustrating to use in the field. The class was encouraged to write on their materials. Training identified the following changes:

1. On page 3 in the training workbook, the Maple Street address with no house number should be asterisked.
2. On pages 5-14 in the lister's instructions, Census Day is not given a date (April 1, 2000).
3. In the lister's instructions, alleys are not in the index.

4. In the lister's instructions, "living quarters" in the glossary should cross-reference "separate living quarters."
5. In the lister's instructions, "where to interview" was in the index under "interviewing." This should also be in the index under each type of structure: single unit, multiunit, special place, commercial (commercial is in the index, but with the wrong page number).
6. The address listing pages in the workbook were too small. Much of the workforce is farsighted.
7. The final test needed to be perforated to make it easier to turn in.

F. Questions and Answers

Throughout training, questions arose. The instructor stated that in his experience most questions anticipated subjects that would be covered subsequently. The instructors answered all questions authoritatively but not always completely. For instance, a question was asked, "What if someone were renting a room out in a house?" The instructor answered "That would be a separate living quarter." My understanding is the rental unit needs direct access to be a separate living quarter, and a probe about direct access would be required.

G. Maps

The instructor did not explain putting in address ranges for new streets, although it was in the written materials.

H. Safety

This part of the training should be expanded. The instructors told the trainees not to go out after dark. A class member asked about whether a canvasser could ask not to do a certain area. The instructor said assignments were not based on gender, but if they were uncomfortable doing any assignment to let the crew leader know. The instructor told the class that they should always follow their intuition and get out of any situation that felt threatening. The handbook did not include the following information: Should you go into a house? What if a respondent threatens with a gun? What about posted no trespassing signs? Known drug houses? One person on another crew was attacked by a pit bull and two other dogs. The person used his Address Listing book to fend off the attack. This is a good idea, which should be passed along in training.

I. Training Exercise

The practical session was poorly conceived. It was not realistic—we used add pages instead of address listing pages for the blocks we visited. There was also a problem with respondent burden. We were told that other training groups might be going through the same area.

Even though the materials were not the ones to be used, we did get to practice going to the right, canvassing alleys, and conducting an interview. We ended up mistakenly adding every establishment, not just the residential units. There were a couple of situations which the manual did not address. For instance, a commercial establishment had a cot used occasionally. We decided it wasn't a living quarters. We knocked at the doors in the alley to check if they were living quarters, even though they were the rear entrances of establishments. There was no guidance on what to do in this situation. At an alley, there was a posted address the same as the establishment facing the street. We inquired at the business establishment, and discovered it was an address to deliver food to the kitchen. One respondent did not speak English, so we tried getting the information by gestures.

J. Interruptions

The class had me as an observer, partnership observers, and the Field Office Supervisor (FOS) as an observer. The other people introduced themselves and stayed briefly. There were also people who dropped in looking for the other training room. The second instructor handled these interruptions. Trainees came late, and at least one person became tired and put his head down. One person had a cell phone that rang. The second time, she took it into the hall.

III. Field Operations

A. Block Canvassing

I observed block canvassing of one large block in a hilly, scenic, and remote area. The block covered four maps, and it took us most of the day to complete. The canvasser was very organized, and she had mapped out her route the evening before.

The area had many tricky situations, and few people were home to clarify the living arrangements and addresses. In one case, we encountered a house with a garage apartment. There was a flag in the front without a sign, and it looked like there could have been as many as three apartments in the garage (two rear balcony and one front first floor). There was no knowledgeable respondent available, so we erred on the conservative side and added only one garage apartment. The canvasser wanted to correct the main address to have the apartment designation "main." I did not think we needed to add a designation, but the handbook did not seem to cover this situation.

In another situation, we canvassed an unmarked dirt road that did not appear on the map. We almost got stuck because our car was too low to the ground. There was nothing on the road, and houses in this neighborhood were on paved roads. Without a four-wheel drive vehicle, we found it impractical to canvass any other dirt roads.

A third unusual case arose on a street with one house on the end of it. The address was listed as 2101 Standstill Road.¹ The mailbox had two numbers, one of them the 2101 number. The occupant said her new house number was a third number with the street name of an intersecting street. We deleted the original listing and added the new address. In another address mixup, we found an address with a resident sitting on his front porch. We asked him the address, and he said the same as the listing book address. The number posted on the house was a different number. We might have deleted the address and added the new address of the posted address if we had not interviewed someone.

In another case, the street had changed its name and numbers, but the post office still mailed to the old addresses. There was no clear instruction in the manual about which address to use. In mailing out forms, if we ignore the lister's deletes, we will include duplicates that have been deleted and added elsewhere. We might also only be able to mail to one of the two addresses, but not be able to identify the second address as a duplicate of the first.

Another confusing situation arose with a marina. There were four addresses listed: 2300 Crawford Lane; 2300 Crawford Lane, Apt. 1; 2300 Crawford Lane, Apt. 2; and 2300 Crawford Lane, Apt. 3. It turned out to be a marina plus two houses on land and two boats with mailboxes. The block canvasser changed them all to special places and added the marina as a special place to the special place add page.

In another situation, we found an extra structure at an address. We added it as a rear house. Later on, in an adjoining street, we had a missing address. We asked a knowledgeable person and found out that it was the address we had added. We left it as we had changed it and deleted the missing address because there was a fence limiting access from the listed street.

At another home, we found a trailer in the yard and a newly built house next to it. The block canvasser said often times people stay in their travel trailers until a house is built. We added the trailer to the add page, even though it would probably not be a housing unit at the time of the census.

During canvassing, the lister saw a structure that I completely missed. It was a green shack in the back of another house. We were told it was a vacation home. It was so hard to see that future enumerators may delete it. For another house we could not find, we checked the outside of a cluster of mailboxes for the houses on that street before we deleted the unit.

We had two map changes. One street shown on the map had been extended; we added the street extension to the map. A house was being built on the street, and we added it to the add page. By next year, the street will probably have more houses on it. The other map change was a misspelled street name. We changed the name on the map and corrected the street name for all of the houses on the street.

¹The addresses listed in this report are not the actual addresses visited.

Besides these tricky situations, the procedures themselves were lacking. The asterisk scheme identifies every third address to visit. At the housing unit, the block canvasser inquires about the living quarters at the visited address and the addresses on either side. It would have been better as an every other housing unit asterisk scheme, asking about the next housing unit in the direction of travel. We walked by a housing unit before we got to the asterisked house and checked it off as we saw its mailbox. Then we did not need to go back to that housing unit if no one was home at the asterisked unit. However, if someone were home at the asterisked unit, we had already filled in the action code for the next-door neighbor, which was confusing. We found ourselves straying from the asterisks altogether, which made it hard to keep track of which places were confirmed by observation and which places we needed to ask about. Canvassers told me coves (cul-de-sacs) were not asterisked correctly. In coves the numbering was consecutive, but the asterisk scheme was based on even/odd house number ranges.

B. Block Canvassing Field Observations

I observed two initial block canvassing field observations. The first canvasser had difficulty asking about additional living quarters, phrasing the question in terms of any other persons living here. The assistant crew leader suggested asking about “living quarters,” and the block canvasser incorporated the suggestion into his interview.

The second block canvasser canvassed in the wrong direction. He did not give respondents the Privacy Act and garbled his delivery. When these mistakes were pointed out, he remedied the situation.

The block he canvassed was eclectic. One establishment had several businesses and apartments interspersed. He left his number at the manager’s office. At another place, there were five apartment designations and five units listed. He wanted to come back to this place too. A third place was a multiunit structure. He ran into a worker he knew who told him about the apartment arrangements. The apartments were a mix of four, eight, and twelve units. He checked everything off and did not inquire at the manager’s office. However, in this case, he needed to know which units were four, eight, or twelve, and if they corresponded to his register. It was not sufficient to simply accept what the worker told him. He also had in his block houses with apartments in and behind the housing units. These were listed in his register correctly.

C. Quality Assurance Samples

The crew leader picked the dependent quality assurance sample for two completed assignment areas. She had no problem selecting the samples. We did find a street name that had not been added to the map. Then there was a question of whether this meant one error or four errors, one for each of the houses on that street. There was nowhere to look up this situation, and the crew leader decided to charge the person with one error.

D. Crew Meeting

The crew meeting was at a sit-down establishment. The crew leader decided to change to a fast food place, so her crew would not feel obligated to buy breakfast. The meeting allowed the crew leader a chance to disseminate information, answer questions, collect paperwork, distribute new assignment areas; and it created comradery among the crew.

E. Crew Leaders' Meeting

The crew leaders were required to meet with the FOS at either 10 a.m. or 2 p.m. every day. They also had to turn in their payroll sheets by noon, which could mean several trips to the office every day. The meeting I observed had the FOS telling them they needed to edit/check the payroll forms and warned against curbstoning. The office secretary had gone home sick, and a fifteen minute meeting was extended to an hour because of phone interruptions.

F. Other

The crew leaders had cell phones, which they found helpful. They liked to be accessible. Many crew members recruited friends. One respondent asked for the phone number to apply for a job. The canvassers told me they liked the flexible hours. One canvasser said a photo identification, visor, or Census 2000 t-shirt would help convince persons to come to the door. The FOS questioned how the field offices were delineated because the Austin office covered the city but not some of the city's suburbs.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Cross-reference and index topics in the reference materials for easy look up.

B. Highlight in one section address change procedures.

C. Notwithstanding budget and timing constraints, go to every other housing unit instead of every third housing unit. Logistically this is a smoother check, because if no one is home, housing units are verified as they are encountered. Ideally, go to every housing unit to avoid asking for information about another housing unit (to protect confidentiality).

D. Emphasize safety.

E. Revise training for special places. My experience was that individual housing units at special places were on the listing pages, not special places.

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